

and Mr. Somphone's safe return to his family, his disappearance is still unexplained.

A respected member of the development community, Mr. Somphone has lived and worked for many years in Laos and his efforts to strengthen Laotian civil society are well documented. The circumstances of his disappearance are mysterious, and, given his high profile, more than troubling. Furthermore, the lack of effort on the part of the Laotian government to investigate what has been described by many international observers as a forced disappearance is deeply disappointing.

Mr. Somphone's courageous work on behalf of political freedom and the protection of human rights in Laos is admirable, and he and others who engage in such pursuits should not fear for their safety, especially at the hands of a government. Despite repeated offers of international assistance and numerous inquiries about Mr. Somphone's welfare, the Laotian government appears satisfied despite having made no progress on the case.

I call on Laotian authorities to recognize the importance this has for Members of Congress and the American people, and people around the world, and to take all actions necessary to enable Mr. Somphone to return home to his family.

#### TRIBUTE TO RAY ALLEN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have spoken many times on the Senate floor about Vermont's dedicated farming families. Today, I would like to recognize the contributions of a great Vermont farmer, at a time of transition, Ray Allen of Allenholm Farm in South Hero, VT.

Ray has, since 1990, represented the University of Vermont as a delegate to the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching, CARET. The APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization representing 235 universities and public land grant institutions nationwide, and CARET advocates for greater national support and understanding of the land-grant university system's food and agricultural research, extension, and teaching programs that enhance the quality of life for all people.

Ray is the longest serving delegate nationally to the CARET and has made many significant contributions to the university extension component of the land grant mission. It is fitting, and should surprise no one that this seventh generation Vermont farmer has so truly served the land grant mission, considering that Ray's ancestors began farming in South Hero, VT in 1870, at about the same time that Vermont Senator Justin Morrill gained passage of his legislation creating the Land Grant College system.

Allenholm Farm is the oldest continuously operating apple orchard in the State of Vermont, and over the

years has grown to be a mainstay of our regional and State agricultural economy.

In 1870, Ray Allen's great-grandfather purchased the current farm, marking the beginning of a family farming tradition on lovely Grand Isle, VT. Today, Ray and his wife Pam run the Allenholm Farm with the help of their children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren.

The chain of islands running up the center of Lake Champlain was once home to more than 100 commercial apple orchards. Today there are fewer, but the Allen's have thrived through creativity. They have diversified the farm to include many new apple varieties, and they now produce and retail their own cider, ice cider, hard cider, applesauce, and more than 3,000 apple pies every year.

Making great use of their location, which is within sight of New York and a few miles from the Canadian border, Ray and Pam have made the Allenholm Farm an international destination. Visitors can rent bicycles, stay the night at the Bed & Breakfast overlooking the orchards, buy maple syrup and maple creamies, and visit their petting zoo to meet Willie and Sassafrass, the famous kissing donkeys.

The Allenholm Farm AppleFest attracts up to 25,000 visitors annually and has yielded a bountiful harvest for the entire local economy of the Champlain islands.

Vermont's agricultural economy is thriving today as more and more of farmers follow Ray and Pam's formula: Focus on superb quality, create value-added products, build the Vermont brand, provide local food to local markets, and have fun doing it. For many visitors, Ray and Pam Allen are the face of farming.

As Vermont's agricultural leaders are inclined to do, Ray has taken on many leadership roles in his local community, as well at the State and National level, all in addition to his decades of service to the Association of Public Land Grant Universities. He has served as town auditor, justice of the peace, a member of the school board and has been chief of the rescue squad since its inception in 1973. Ray's contributions to his alma mater, the University of Vermont, are too numerous to list completely here, but they include current or past membership on the boards of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, UVM Extension, and the Alumni Council. Ray's feats as a student track star are still the subject of legend now, 50 years later, and two annual track trophies bear his name.

As a strong supporter of the land grant mission, I thank Ray Allen for his service to the Association of Public Land Grant Universities as a delegate to the Council of Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching. I am certain that Ray will be missed in this role but that he will continue to build on this record of accomplishment and

public service in many other venues and that the seventh generation Allenholm Farm will continue to thrive under his leadership.

Marcelle and I think of Ray and Pam as very special friends and cherished Vermonters.

#### RECOGNIZING SUNDY BEST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an exceptionally talented country music duo from my home State of Kentucky. Kris Bentley and Nick Jamerson have vaulted their band, Sundry Best, from the small bars and music halls of eastern Kentucky into the national spotlight. The story of their rise is remarkable, and one that is far from its conclusion.

Nick and Kris first met in elementary school in Prestonsburg, KY, where they both grew up in music-loving families. The two started a band together in high school but parted ways when Nick went to play football at Pikeville College and Kris enrolled in Centre College, where he played basketball. Nick's passion for music never subsided, though, and after college he contacted Kris to inquire about purchasing a drum set. As it happened, Kris's passion for music remained as well—he didn't have a set to sell, but he would gladly come play with his old buddy Nick. The two friends picked up right where they left off, and the very next night they were playing their first gig together.

The band's big break came in November of 2010. Nick had just moved to Lexington with Kris, and the two landed a gig at Redmon's, a classic Lexington live music establishment. Previously the two had played just as "Nick and Kris," but for a venue like Redmon's they needed a name that they could promote. The two settled on one that reflected their musical roots in Sunday church services. As Kris tells it, "It was originally going to be Sunday's Best but then we said, 'No, Sundry Best.'" The duo dropped the "a" from Sunday because, "That's the way we talk."

The show at Redmon's was an enormous success, so much so that they began to play a regular gig there. This consistent venue for their music was instrumental in establishing the band's fan base and name recognition. Kris acknowledges that this was when "people started taking us seriously . . . because that's a premier music venue."

Things have been looking up for Sundry Best ever since. In 2013 they released their first album, *Door Without a Screen*, and watched it climb into the iTunes Top 10. The video for the hit song from the album, "Home (I Wanna Go)," helped drive the album's success and is a fixture on Country Music Television.

As a fellow Kentuckian, I am proud of the success seen by Sundry Best. Nick and Kris are not only talented musicians, but they are also outstanding ambassadors for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Although their